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CHEAP REPOSITORY.

SUNDAY READING.

THE

HISTORY

OF

PETER the APOSTLE. A



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The HISTORY, &c.

If we consider the lives and acts of the holy Apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ, we shall find each of them ample matter for pious reflection and imitation, but in none more than in that of St. Peter, the principal events of whose life I select as proper subject for the present Sunday Reading. Peter was born in Bethsaida, a city of Gallilee, and was by trade a Fisherman. His education was superior to that of persons in a low station; his profession was both toilsome and laborious, and by no means profitable.

We see that the Apostles were not chosen for any peculiar talents or endowments, they were, for the most part, poor unlearned men, remarkable only for the simplicity of their lives and for that humility of heart which made them willing to receive the good seed sown by our blessed Lord. For the stubborn and proud heart rejecteth it. The Holy Spirit of God in vain knocketh but cannot find admittance: for our Lord would that all of us should be saved, it is only our own hard, sinful nature that shuts us up in the kingdom of Satan and holds us captive. St. Luke gives us a particular account of the Conversion of St. Peter in the viii chapter of the Gospel. "And it came to pass as the people pressed upon him (Jesus Christ) to hear the word of God, he stood by the lake of Genesareth, and saw

two ships standing by the lake, but the fishermen were gone out of them and were washing their nets. And he entered into one of the ships, which was Simon's (Peter) and prayed him that he would thrust out a little from the land; and he sat down and taught the people out of the ship. Now when he had left speaking, he said unto Simon, launch out into the deep and let down your nets for draught. And Simon answering, said unto him, "master, we have toiled all the night and have taken nothing, nevertheless at thy word I will let down the net." And when they had done this, they inclosed a great multitude of fishes, and their net brake. And they beckoned unto their partners which were in the other ship that they should come to help them, and they came and filled both the ships, so that they began to sink. When Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord. For he was astonished and all that were with him at the draught of the fishes which they had taken; and so were also James and John, the sons of Zebedee, which were partners with Simon. And Jesus said unto Simon, fear not; from henceforth thou shalt catch men. And when they had brought their ships to land, they forsook all and followed him."

On reading the above, some of us may be inclined to think, that it was very natural for St. Peter to quit all he had and to follow our Lord, after having seen him perform such a miracle. They had been out all night and had not caught one fish, but at the word of our Lord the net filled, and they loaded two ships so that there was danger of the sinking. We are ready to exclaim, had we been

in the case of Peter, we also would have left all we had and followed Jesus; but let us not be so ready to arrogate to ourselves the faith of the Apostle, till we have examined the matter more closely. Though his faith, was no doubt, confirmed by the miracle wrought by our Saviour, he appears to have been strongly under the influence of this principle, previous to the circumstance. He was both a hearer and a doer of the word of the Lord, we find him among those who listened to his doctrine, and when desired by him to thrust out a little from land, that he might avoid the press of the multitude, he hesitates not a moment, but immediately obeys. When our Saviour afterwards bids him launch out farther into the ocean and throw out the net, he replies, master we have toiled all night and have taken nothing, nevertheless at thy word I will let down the net. I am afraid many of us would have been inclined to say, of what use is it, when I know I cannot take any thing. I do not see what end it can answer to take so much trouble. We should not, I am afraid, like Peter, have said, master we have toiled all night and have taken nothing, nevertheless at thy word I will let down the net, and in the same instant obeyed. Our Lord saw the faith and obedience of Peter, and was, therefore, pleased to confirm it by the great miracle that succeeded, and determined him to leave all and follow his Redeemer. St. Peter has in this instance, left us a noble example of that prompt obedience we ought to pay to the commands of God, as communicated by the Prophets and Apostles. If, as we read the holy scriptures, some things occur in them which appear contrary to our finite ideas of right and wrong, and Satan who is ever laying in wait to

ensnare us, and to insinuate himself into our
 most secret thoughts, should lead us to reason
 thus, of what use is such an institution, it appears
 to me very strange and absurd, and we are impious
 enough to proceed further, and to say if the Almighty
 mighty had consulted me, I would not have done
 thus and thus: I would have rewarded this man
 and punished that, let us check such impious reason-
 ing, suggested only by the evil one, by reflecting
 that it is impossible for a creature so weak and
 imperfect as man, to be capable of comprehending
 the ways of the great Author of the universe; the
 wisest philosophers both heathen and christian
 have been unable to account for some of the fin-
 est operations of nature; this ought to teach us
 humility, teach us our own nothingness, and that
 the highest wisdom is to love and fear God. His
 goodness is manifested to all, sensible of this, when
 we cannot comprehend we should learn to trust
 knowing that God is good, and that we are poor
 blind erring mortals, incapable of comprehending
 the smallest of his works, we should, like Peter
 without any gain-saying or questioning, obey the
 sacred word, seeking only the will of our Lord
 not our own, which must ever lead us into error.
 Let us rather, instead of having recourse to our
 own imperfect reasonings, imitate the holy Apostles
 and when Satan inclines us to cavil at, or doubt
 the truth of any text of scripture, lift up our hearts
 with humility, and say, Lord I am a poor weak
 creature, unable to comprehend the full con-
 tent of thy judgment and mercies, nevertheless
 it is thy word, I believe and know it must be good.

St. Peter's faith in our Saviour was very great
 we find him at all times ready to confess his be-

him, on which account he is pronounced by our
 aviour blessed; when our Lord asks him, "whom
 say men that I am," he lies, "some say thou
 art Elias, some John the Baptist;" Jesus, then says
 to him, "but whom say ye that I am?" To which
 Peter replies, "Lord, thou art the Christ, the Son
 of the living God." Jesus answers, "blessed art
 thou Peter, for flesh and blood hath not revealed it
 to thee, but my father which is in heaven." This
 is explained in another passage of scripture, where
 our Lord says, "no man can come to me except
 the father draw him."

When many of the disciples forsook their master
 on account of his doctrine, which was so repugnant
 to the mammon of this world, he says to those that
 remain, "will ye also forsake me?" Peter answers
 for himself, and those that remained; "Lord, whi-
 ther should we go, thou hast the words of eternal
 life." The next remarkable event that we read of
 in his holy Apostle, is related in the xvth chapter of
 Matthew. "And straightway Jesus constrained
 his disciples to get into a ship, and to go before
 him unto the other side, while he sent the multitude
 away. And when he had sent the multitude away,
 he went up into a mountain apart to pray; and
 when the evening was come he was there alone.
 And the ship was now in the midst of the sea, tossed
 with waves, for the wind was contrary; and in the
 fourth watch of the night, Jesus went unto them,
 walking on the sea. And when the disciples saw
 him walking on the sea, they were troubled, saying,
 "it is a spirit, and they cried out for fear. But
 straightway Jesus spake unto them, saying, "be of
 good cheer, it is I, be not afraid. And Peter an-
 swered him and said, Lord, if it be thou, bid me

come unto thee on the water. And he said, come. And when Peter was come down out of the ship, he walked on the water to go to Jesus. But when he saw the wind boisterous, he was afraid, and beginning to sink, he cried, saying, "Lord, save me." And immediately Jesus stretched forth his hand and caught him, and said unto him, "O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt?" And when they were come into the ship the wind ceased. Then they that were in the ship came and worshipped him, saying, "of a truth thou art the Son of God."

Peter here felt forcibly the frailty of his own nature; the spirit was willing but the flesh was weak. His faith in Jesus was strong, but when he saw the boisterous waves rise round him, he forgot at whose command he trod the liquid element, and in terror cried out, "Lord save me, I perish."

Peter is here a true picture of every poor christian struggling with the infirmities of his nature. We begin our course strong in faith and hope, but the flesh continually lusteth against the spirit, and Satan, taking advantage of our frailty, lays a thousand snares for our souls, the riches, the pleasures, the honours, the vanities of life assail us in a thousand shapes; poverty has also its temptations: At a distance we view them with indifference, and feel ourselves secure, but when the hour of temptation arrives we are too often apt to yield, and have need to call out with the Apostle, "Lord save us." And if we cry to him with a sincere desire of his assistance, and with a true sense of our inability to help ourselves, he will save us; he will stretch forth his hand to help us in the hour of trial and danger, as our compassionate Saviour

Peter, and though he may permit us to stumble
 will not suffer us to be wholly cast down.
 There is nothing that should be more carefully
 avoided by the true christian than self-confidence;
 we must know little of the human heart who can
 presume on his own strength, and have had little
 experience, who does not feel its insufficiency;
 yet this seems to be a weakness into which the best
 are liable to be betrayed. The holy Apostle him-
 self is a signal proof of this. When our Lord fore-
 tells his crucifixion, and afterwards added, "all
 shall be offended because of me this night;" un-
 willing to believe himself capable of such ingra-
 titude, or that one whom he so dearly loved should
 experience such unkindness, Peter, forgetful of
 the frailty of human nature, betrays too much pre-
 sumption and self-confidence, when he replies,
 though all shall be offended, yet will not I." He
 is immediately reproved by our Lord, who "saith
 unto him, verily I say unto thee that this day, even
 this night, before the cock crow, thou shalt de-
 ny me thrice." One would have supposed this
 proof would have recalled Peter to a sense
 of his frailty, and that he would have replied,
 Lord I know that I am a poor, frail, sinful mortal,
 and that my greatest strength is weakness, and that with-
 out thee I can do nothing, help thou mine infir-
 mity and save me from so great a sin, but, alas!
 we are informed, "that he spake the more vehement-
 ly, though I should die with thee yet will I not deny
 thee, and so also said the other Apostles. Not-
 withstanding these protestations when the Jews
 laid hands on our blessed Redeemer, we are told,
 that they all forsook him, and fled.

Great as their love and faith was they had not surmounted the love of this life sufficiently to suffer with their master, though most of them afterwards laid down their lives for him, rejoicing that they were accounted worthy to suffer for his sake. Peter however, though he had not constancy openly confess him, followed at a distance, even into the palace of the High Priest where they had led Jesus he could not forsake, though he had not constancy to suffer with him. "And when they had kindled a fire in the midst of the hall and were sat down together, Peter sat down among them. But a certain maid beheld him as he sat by the fire, and earnestly looked upon him and said, this man was also with him. And he denied saying, "Woman I know him not. And after a little while another saw him and said, thou art also of them. And Peter said, man, I am not." And about the space of one hour after, another confidently affirmed saying, "Of a truth, this fellow also was with him; for he is a Galilean. And Peter said, man I know not what thou sayest. And immediately while he spake the cock crew. And the Lord turned and looked upon Peter; and Peter remembered the word of the Lord, how he had said unto him before the cock crow thou shalt deny me thrice. And he went out and wept bitterly, bitterly indeed! Oh how his heart must have smote him when his Lord turned and looked upon him, what daggers must have planted in his soul! How passionately must he have lamented his folly and the aggravations of it; the fall of this zealous Apostle is a lesson to each of us and warns us never to remit that watchfulness and prayer which are so necessary to our security, nor voluntarily to place ourselves in the

of temptati^{on}, presuming on our own strength
 to resist them. As a pious writer observes, even in
 those trials which the Providence of God brings
 upon us, we must beware of trusting more to our
 own resolution than to his divine assistance. When
 we cease to be watchful over our own hearts
 and to suspect the evil that is in our corrupt sinful
 nature, we are then on the brink of a precipice
 from which nothing but the Mercy of God, by shew-
 ing us our danger, can snatch us. The Apostle was
 fully sensible of this, and, no doubt, mourned it
 with the deepest sincerity, and we cannot enough ad-
 mire the goodness of our Lord, as pointed out by
 a pious writer, in appearing so early to Peter after
 his resurrection, to comfort him, says he, no doubt,
 under his great sorrow for his late fall, and to en-
 courage him with fresh assurances of his favour;
 and, to confirm him in the great article of the
 resurrection, requiring him, as a farther proof of
 his love, to feed his sheep; in other words, faith-
 fully to instruct, rule, and guide his disciples.
 Faithfully did the Apostle perform what his Lord
 required of him: for we read that after the resur-
 rection of Jesus he preached with great boldness,
 and when the Jews would have obliged him to de-
 cide, he referred it to their own decision, whether
 he ought to obey God or man. As St. Peter was
 brought up a Jew, we find that he could not im-
 mediately throw off those prejudices which were
 common to his nation; he could not believe
 that the grace of God would be extended to the
 Gentiles, till the Almighty was pleased to remove
 the veil from his eyes by a remarkable vision, and
 shew him that the well-meaning heathens, who
 exercised works of love and mercy, were as ac-

ceptable to him as the Jews, his chosen people and should be received. The whole account of Peter's vision, and the consequence of it, is to be found in the viiiith. chapter of the Acts, and forms a most interesting part of scripture, though too long to admit of being transcribed here.

We there see how wrong it is to entertain prejudice against any of our fellow-beings, who may happen to be of another country, or to entertain sentiments different from ours; we have an undoubted right to prefer our own, and should give the Almighty thanks, and glorify his holy name for having placed us in a situation, and given us grace to receive his holy word, but we should be very cautious, poor sinful creatures as we are, how we dare set bounds to the mercy of a Being who is all love, and who, as the Apostle acknowledges when convinced of his error, is no respecter of persons. "Of a truth," says he, "I perceive that God is no respecter of persons; but in every nation he that feareth him and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him." We then read that Herod the king, stretched forth his hand to vex certain of the church, that he apprehended Peter, put him in prison, and delivered him to four quarters of soldiers to guard him, intending, without doubt, after the days of unleavened bread, to bring him forth to the people and to kill him, as he had before done James the brother of John. Peter was therefore, was strictly guarded, but prayer, we are told was made without ceasing by the church for God for him.

The very night that Herod would have brought him before the people, as he was sleeping between two soldiers, bound with two chains, and the door

the prison closely guarded by the keeper, "Be-
hold," says the scripture, "the Angel of the Lord
came upon him and a light shined in the prison;
and he smote Peter on the side, and raised him up,
saying, arise up quickly. And his chains fell off
his hands, and the Angel said unto him, gird thy-
self and bind on thy sandals; and he did so. And
he saith unto him, cast thy garment about thee, and
follow me. And he did so, but wist, that is, knew
not, that it was true, (or real) that was done by
the Angel, but thought he saw a vision." "When
they were past the first and second ward, they
came to an iron gate that led into the city, which,
as we are told, opened of its own accord to them,
and they went out; and when the Angel had con-
ducted him through one street he left him." Peter
was by this time convinced it was not a vision, for
he said, now I know of a surety that the Lord
hath sent his Angel and hath delivered me out of
the hand of Herod, and from (or contrary to) all
the expectations of the people of the Jews.
Peter having considered with himself awhile what
he should do, went to the house of the Apostle
Mark, where, we are told, many were gathered to-
gether, praying. When he knocked at the door,
his voice was immediately known by a damsel who
came to open it; but when she heard Peter's voice,
she was so rejoiced that she did not stay to open it,
but ran in to communicate the glad tidings, which
far surpassed the hopes of those to whom she told
them that they could not give credit to what she
affirmed, but said she must certainly be mad, and
when she still persisted that it was Peter who was at
the gate, they said, "it is then his Angel," thinking
that he was dead, and had appeared to them. They

were soon, however, undeceived; upon opening the gate they saw Peter, who declared to them that the Lord had brought him out of prison.

This, among thousands of other instances, is a signal proof of the efficacy of prayer. Prayer was made, we are told, *without ceasing by the whole church for Peter*, while he was in prison: Every devout christian, no doubt, lifted up his heart with the greatest fervour for so able a minister of the word of God, and we see in what a signal manner their prayers were answered. Prayer is the only mode of communication we have with so great a Being as the Almighty, and ought not our hearts to glow with the most fervent gratitude, that he permits such poor frail creatures as we are to have such an intercourse? What then must be our insatiable thirst for such a glorious privilege? The great God of the universe, through the medium of his blessed Son, permits such poor frail creatures as we are, loaded with sin and wretchedness, to draw near, to communicate our wants, and to lift up our souls to him for strength and consolation; and shall we neglect such a blessed privilege? No, if Satan has not quite blinded us, let us rejoice in it, and be all times ready to improve it. Let us draw near with humble and contrite hearts, and implore him to give us grace to ask such things only as may please him. I feel inclined to enlarge upon this important subject, but as that would encroach too much on the limits here assigned me, I shall reserve what I have farther to say till another opportunity, and proceed to inform my reader, that St. Peter, after having preached the gospel to the Jews dispersed in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, and Asia

opening towards the latter part of his life went to Rome, where he continued to labour in establishing christianity.

About sixty-nine years after the death of Christ, Nero, one of the most cruel of the Roman Emperors, raised a great persecution against the christians, whom he accused of setting fire to the city of Rome, and St. Peter perished among many others. The manner of his death was by crucifixion, and, at his own desire, with his head downwards, for he affirmed, that he was unworthy to suffer in the same posture wherein his Lord had suffered before him. St. Peter wrote two Epistles, addressed to those Jewish converts that were scattered throughout different cities of Asia Minor, on account of the persecution at Jerusalem and elsewhere: The principal design of the first was to comfort them under those manifold trials and temptations, and to instruct them how to conduct themselves both in civil and christian life. In the second Epistle he continues the same subject, and exhorts them to be steadfast in the faith, lest they should be turned from it by the many persecutions which they were liable.

Happy ought we to think ourselves, who live in a country where we can openly profess our faith, and serve God without fear of such dangers. How happy would the christians in those days have been to have enjoyed such a privilege! Let us lift up our hearts in thankfulness to the giver of all good gifts, for this, among the multitude of blessings, and pray him to give us grace to take a due advantage of it.

T H E E N D.

A LIST OF TRACTS.

HISTORIES.

Delays are Dangerous.
The Affectionate Orphans.
The Wreck.
The Wife Reformed.

SUNDAY READINGS.

The Widow of Zarephath.
Ananias and Sapphira.
The History of Samson.
The History of St. Peter the Apostle.

POETRY.

Richard and Rebecca.
The Good Aunt.
The Wanderer.
The Fatal Choice.